

NOTES ON TIME IN THE MODERN BRITISH NOVEL (6)

YUKIO ANDOH

CHAPTER VI

TEMPORAL ORDERS AND FICTIONAL FORM

The previous analysis of simultaneity, in both senses of the term, leads naturally to broader questions of fictional structure and form. One may ask, for example, whether the juxtaposition which results from simultaneity is one of individual events, thoughts, or feelings alone, or whether beneath the particular simultaneities one will not find the juxtaposition of entire temporal orders. To be able to answer this question, I shall first have to define a number of temporal-structural elements in the novel.

The two most notable developments within the modern novel are perhaps, first, the growing discrepancy between narrated and narrative time, second, the closer interweaving of fictional time with cosmic and existential time. In English fiction, the first development appears in its most consistently radical form in the work of Joseph Conrad; in America, Faulkner has been its most outstanding exponent. The second development is usually a concomitant of the stream-of-consciousness technique, although cosmic time may enter into the novel independently of this technique. Simultaneously with these expansions of fictional time through the intrusion of other temporal orders, a new significance has come to attach to chronological-fictional time itself. From being merely the time during which an action takes place, it has come to represent an entire order of being, whether it be industrial civilization, the social order, everyday routine—or hell itself.

Conrad's fragmentation of fictional time has implications mainly for character portrayal and esthetic form, though Mr. Guerard has suggested that it also affects theme. The "chronological dislocations" in *Nostromo*, for instance, and the resulting expansion and contraction of the experienced historical time, turn Sulaco history into an absurdity. Here is the beginning of the decline of history so evident in the three younger authors of this study. The portrayal of character through a fragmented sequence of momentary flashes of insight and evidential reports does not to the same extent nullify the history of individual development, but it goes a long way in this direction. Conrad's heroes fall and are redeemed, if they are given the opportunity, in the instant; the temporal interval between the two moments of fate precipitates no real development of character. The main difference between the fallen and the unfallen is a spiritual one, indicated to a certain extent by their different time perspectives: the innocent man focuses his vision on an open and glorious future; the sinner or disillusioned man is fixated upon a mo-

ment or period in his personal past. The impressionistic method, with its lightning flashes of intuition illuminating the subject from various angles, is an esthetic analogue of the disrupted and generally catastrophic existential time of the Conradian character. It is perhaps these two features, the breakdown of the order of history and, to a lesser extent, of "historical" individual development, which account for the spatial rather than temporal form of Conrad's novels, to be developed more fully in the following.

The fragmentation of fictional time in Conrad is as a rule not accompanied by the emergence of different time orders. In a story like *Heart of Darkness*, where cosmic time appears in the guise of an ever-threatening primitive past, the narrative is not particularly fragmented. A bitter expose of the idea of progress and the "white man's burden," *Heart of Darkness* gives the biological and psychological reasons for the breakdown of history which marks Conrad's only truly historical novel, *Nostromo*. "The mind of man is capable of anything—because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future. What was there after all? Joy, fear, sorrow, devotion, valour, rage—who can tell?—but truth stripped of its cloak of time (HD, 96–97) In *Heart of Darkness*, the cloak of time appears as the filthy rags of pseudo-civilization, flaunted shamelessly by the "pilgrims". Not excepting the sea stories, where cosmic time is immediately present by means of sea and stars, this is perhaps the one of Conrad's works in which cosmic time plays the most important role. In *The Nigger of the Narcissus* and *Typhoon*, the sea can hardly be said to constitute a specific time level, whereas in *Heart of Darkness* the sea, river, forests, and savages together do constitute such a level. Against it is pitted the few thousand years of human civilization, which Marlow compares to a "flash of lightning in the clouds." (49) The conflict between the two forces is centered in Mr. Kurtz, with Marlow as a good second; together they exemplify two divergent resolutions of the conflict. The particular circumstances of setting and incident, as well as narrative technique, make both these orders of time, historical and cosmic, grow naturally out of the fictional time, which covers only a few months. The narrator introduces historical time by referring first to the beginning of the European era of colonization, then to the Roman colonizers of Britain. Throughout, with unconcealed and heavy irony, Conrad embodies historical time in the activities of the "pilgrims." Cosmic time enters in two principal ways, first, by means of the description of the tide which enclose the chronological action of the story, second, by a sort of archeologically oriented space-time technique. The progression up the river on the level of chronological fictional time is paralleled by a deeper progression—or retrogression rather—to man's first ages. *Heart of Darkness*, on one level, is thus a story of archeological time travel. "Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world....." (92) The departure, followed by Kurtz's deathbed vision, is a return to historical time as well as to a moral universe. This return is climaxed by Marlow's visit to Kurtz's Intended, who represents the spiritual forces on which civilization is based. Thus Conrad implies that the historical process does not automatically create values; the latter have to be postulated by men and incorporated in the process. As Marlow says, "Principles won't do. Acquisitions, clothes, pretty rags—rags that would fly off at the first good shake. No; you want a deliberate belief." (97) One notes the sustained image of the "cloak of time" underneath this rejection of humanism; principles, as here used, are temporal

acquisitions and have only a conditional validity. Kurtz's Intended represents an absolute order; she lives in and outside of time simultaneously. Her sorrow is an ideal emotion and is accordingly as fresh at the time of Marlow's visit as at its inception; like a work of art it has preserved its integrity unaffected by the passage of time. Though Marlow has to compromise with his code and tell a lie, he does it in order to preserve this ideal order, which is the only source of meaning in the historical process. Despite its pessimism, *Heart of Darkness* defines a fundamentally Christian view of time and history. The cosmic cycle, evident in sea and primordial forest, is a force threatening man with moral annihilation. The order of history, fragile and precarious, can at any time be absorbed by the cosmic whirlpool if it does not maintain its contact with a world transcending both time and history, eternity. These three orders exist simultaneously in this work,¹⁾ a factor which as much as any contributes to its literary excellence.

Only stories and novels in which Westerners are placed in a primitive setting, like, for example, "An Outpost of Progress" and *The Rescue*, incorporate cosmic time in its morally most threatening aspect. Here Conrad uses the alien, non-human features of the natural order as a means of cultural criticism. More frequent is the opposition of the order of chronology, introduced through the fictional time of the novel, and existential time. Most of Conrad's heroes, as their centripetal dependence on the moment of fall and grace would lead one to assume, live in a timeless medium. Time to them is significant mainly as a means of annihilating or transcending it, a fact which becomes immediately evident on considering the most typically Conradian characters, like Axel Heyst, Lord Lim, Razmov, and Dr. Nonygham. Conrad repeatedly points out the discrepancy between the speeds and paces of simple chronological sequence and the complexes of desire, remorse, despair, and hope which make up the personal *durée*. Perhaps one reason for the breakup of straight time sequence is Conrad's realization that the mind does not proceed in that sequence. Yet, even where the sequence is broken up, the separate parts have to proceed continuously and consecutively, a circumstance due to limitations of medium of which Conrad was sharply aware. There is, possibly, a connection between his critical awareness of the inability of language to present simultaneous occurrences and his skepticism of any order of sequential facts. He likes to make the reader aware of the wide gap between the order of facts, which represent a rigid space-time schema, and psychological reality, with its complex existential logic of image, emotion, and value. In relating Jim's account of his desertion, Conrad notes the incongruity between the "facts those men were so eager to know which had been visible, tangible, open to the senses, occupying their place in space and time, requiring for their existence a fourteen hundred-ton steamer and twenty-seven minutes by the watch," (LJ, 30) and the "something invisible, a directing spirit of perdition that dwelt within, like a malevolent soul in a detestable body." (31) Conrad maintains the balance between the two orders of reality, the inner and the outer, the chronological and the outer, the chronological and the psychological; but usually he emphasizes their separation rather than concurrence.

In Mrs. Woolf's and Joyce's fiction, which is to a much higher degree psychological and symbolic, the different orders of time are much more consistently juxtaposed, Pre-

sent already in *The Voyage Out*, these orders find adequate statement in Mrs. Woolf's work only in *Mrs. Dalloway* and the later novels. Through the simple device of Big Ben and the more or less synchronous neighborhood church bells, both cosmic and chronological time reverberate consistently throughout the novel. Big Ben strikes solemnly, signifying the relentless passage of cosmic time and ceaseless approach of death; other clocks, sometimes lagging behind Big Ben, remind Clarissa of "all sorts of little things besides—Mrs. Marsham, Ellie Henderson, glasses for ices…… She must telephone now at once." (MD, 193-94) These clocks represent the discontinuous and fragmentary rhythm of social time, with which the characters are more or less happily in step.²⁾ Usually, Mrs. Woolf's major characters feel these two orders of time as destructive and disruptive; to them, it is the order of existential time, with its moments of human communion and its glimpses of eternity, which informs life with value.²⁾ As for the concept of a purely technical literary fictional time, it becomes in a novel like *Mrs. Dalloway*; constituted by a hierarchy of different time orders, largely irrelevant. Though Big Ben beats the narrative rhythm of the novel, its symbolic functions overshadow the purely structural one. Technique and theme are inseparably interwoven.

Mrs. Dalloway is probably more ambitious in its interlocking of the parallel temporal orders than any other of Mrs. Woolf's novels. Its *dénouement* relies on a conjunction in one moment of these orders; this comes about at Clarissa's party. Here the death and renewal pattern of the cosmic cycle—embodied chiefly in Septimus Smith—clashes with and gives significance to a routine social occasion, which, on a different level, acquires value as the focus of personal reintegration. In most of the following novels, one at least of these orders is relatively unimportant. With two exceptions, *The Years* and *Between the Acts*, the slighted order is that of chronological social time; naturally, as fictional time is expanded, the importunity of the clock lessens. In *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*, the characters, who are surrounded by or immersed in the elemental rhythms of the sea, are faced less with the problem of personal fragmentation created by the clock than by the destructiveness implicit in cosmic time. It is against this destructiveness that Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe pit themselves, the former by creating a hermetic world of suspended moments immune to detrition, the latter by transforming the transience of life into the permanence of art. In *The Waves*, cosmic and existential time are more closely related; the eternal sea flows in the characters as in nature. The congruity between the two realms is apparent from the author's consistent use of the falling of a drop to symbolize the passage of existential time. It is primarily because of the subordination of existential to cosmic time in this novel that the sense of triumph evident both in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* is here hardly perceptible.

Three remaining works, *Orlando*, *The Years*, and *Between the Acts*, contain in various degree and in different ways the order of historical time as well. *Orlando*, which Mr. Mendilow takes to exemplify the principle that unites all Virginia Woolf's work: the immanence of the past in the present, the Bergsonian conception of the moment as the microcosm of life, enriches the individual present by the historical reverberations of centuries. Instead of Bergson, however, whose *durée* can hardly exceed the limits of personality, I would, besides Sterne—whose influence and importance Mendilow overstates—consider Henry James and H. G. Wells as Mrs. Woolf's instigators……All the con-

cepts needed, the subjective relativity of perceptual time as well as the past-inflated present, are readily accessible in English writers with whose work Virginia Woolf was thoroughly acquainted. Because of the almost total absence of cosmic time in *Orlando*, it entirely lacks the deep pathos of the more properly novelistic works. In a sense, *Orlando* moves in the timeless world of fairy-land; when time intrudes, in the guise of a hammering clock, it is not as a universal force which rules our lives, but only as a social inconvenience which can be evaded. Actually, then, there are only two time orders implicit in the book, existential time—which absorbs history—and chronological-social time. Fictional time, which in the major part of the book coincides with a freely treated progression of English history, toward the end merges with the existential time of *Orlando*, as the various historical periods tick off their times simultaneously in her mind.

The defeat of destructive time which Mrs. Woolf achieves in *Orlando* is a *tour de force*; it is made possible by the veritable exclusion of cosmic time. This order takes its revenge in *The Years*, where history, instead of becoming absorbed by an ever-expanding present moment, is nullified by the process of decay implicit in nature. Despite the fact that this book also contains moments of attempted personal integration, these moments are neither comprehensive nor intense enough to introduce existential time as a really significant order. Mrs. Woolf no doubt intended to present simultaneously the large cycles of nature, history, and individual development; one can safely say she did not succeed. Nothing significant emerges. *Between the Acts*, a cross between *Orlando* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, is incomparably more successful. Here all three orders of time are present—cosmic through the evocations of a primordial prehistoric age, history through the pageant, and individual existential time mainly through Isa and Giles. Though, as in *The Years*, cosmic time contains the other temporal orders, the book ends, like *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, on a note of renewal. Notably, as in *Mrs. Dalloway*, the fictional time of the work covers only one day.

I have indicated the permutations of the temporal orders in Mrs. Woolf's work partly to show the great variety of conception of which she is capable, partly to demonstrate the unequal success of her experiments. She succeeds best where, as in *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *Between the Acts*, fictional time is short or where, as in *The Waves*, she treats intensely selected scenes from the lives of a few characters while maintaining a fictional time corresponding to a normal lifespan. Also, there is some correlation between achievement and the ability to present concurrently several levels of time.

Whereas Virginia Woolf's fiction shows a varied development, that of Joyce changes consistently in one direction only. Already his first work is unusual; for though the *Portrait* is an example of the apprenticeship novel—Bildungsroman—it departs in many ways not only from its type but from the contemporary novel in general. The book's fictional time is not simply the locus of a man's growing up; it is also the medium of national tragedy and of man's ultimate fate. Coexisting with and largely determining the constantly expanding existential time of Stephen, the order of history and of Christian time are fairly continuously present in the first four chapters; at the end of chapter four, they are both rejected in favor of a philosophy of eternal recurrence. From now

on, history and individual existential time follow the pattern of cosmic time in Joyce's fiction. Though the separate levels remain, they are informed with a universal rhythm. This is apparent both in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. In the former work, the fictional time of eighteen hours contains not only the crucial experiences of a human lifetime, but, through the Homeric parallel, all of history as well. The pattern of recurrence and metamorphosis which dominates nature also dominates history and individual destiny. Both Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus are well aware of this dominance. *Finnegans Wake* brings the many-levelled temporal structure to its final perfection. Here the cyclical pattern determines not only the mode of existence of nature, history, and individual man, but even that of the book itself. Furthermore, by a more radical use of metamorphosis, made possible by the dream mechanism which underlies the work, the basic substance both of nature, man, and history reveals itself as one and the same. HCE is mountain as well as archetypal man, ALP, river as well as archetypal woman; they are also individuals with particular histories. The same applies to all of the book's characters. Never was a fictional time of the duration of one night more crowded with occurrences and characters. Applied to this work, in fact, the concept "fictional time" has only a Pickwickian meaning; the few hours expand to sempiternity. The mediating idea between the few hours of fictional time and the all-time of a universal history—adumbrated already in *Ulysses*—is that of the microcosm. As L. A. G. Strong has suggested, Joyce most probably received this idea from Blake.³ It is the literary execution of the microcosmic design which accounts for the nearly insuperable difficulty of *Finnegans Wake*.

Compared to the work of Mrs. Woolf and Joyce, Huxley's is thin. History, for instance, is almost totally absent; it is destroyed by dialectics rather than, as in Woolf, through absorption into the rhythm of prehistory or, as in Joyce, through its accommodation to a cosmic mythical cycle. Existential time frequently lacks depth, being limited to a hermetic present. These limitations apply to all books except *Eyeless in Gaza*, which because of its cathartic function necessarily contains a complex existential time. In the early works, it is cosmic and social-chronological time which dominate; later, cosmic time is replaced by eternity. It is mainly because *Antic Hay* is so thoroughly immersed in the descending phase of the natural cycle that the work has a certain kind of greatness. It is not, needless to say, the highest kind; but in some ways this book is superior to anything else which Huxley wrote prior to *Eyeless in Gaza*. Its weakness is that of the characters, who are "pure" intellectuals and therefore cannot have a destiny in any deeper sense. It may be worthy of note that the only characters with any depth in these early works are the diabolists, Coleman in *Antic Hay* and Spandell in *Point Counter Point*. A celestial counterbalance to this diabolism is present in rudimentary form both in *Antic Hay* and *Those Barren Leaves*; in *Point Counter Point*, it frames the entire action, which is bounded at one end by the pastoral serenity of Bach's Suite in B minor, at the other by the intense sublimities of Beethoven A minor Quartet. Despite Rampion's healthy naturalistic humanism, the music which encloses the book casts an ironical light on him as well as on the less healthy and sane characters.

There is in Huxley a constant tension between the temporal and the timeless; but the timeless appears in many forms. In *Point Counter Point* it is that of art; in *Brave*

New World, that of *soma* and sex. The glaring contrast between the feverish clock-like activity of a mechanized civilization and the endless felicities of experienced "eternity" in the latter work has no counterpart in any other novel. From *Eyeless in Gaza* on, the most accentuated timeless level is that of spiritual rather than animal eternity. Usually, these two modes of timelessness will exhibit a relation of mutual tension; at the same time they conjointly reduce the mean level of existential time to the absurd. Disregarding for the moment *Eyeless in Gaza*, which has a more complex structure, one notes in *After Many a Summer* a series of counterpointed patterns: On the one hand, Miss Maunciple's scientifically induced "erotic epilepsy" (221) described in terms of a momentary religious experience, contrasts with Mr. Stoyte's frantic race with time and his passionate interest in longevity; on the other, Mr. Propter's timeless spiritual doctrine, which presents time and craving as "two aspects of the same thing.....the raw material of evil," (122) shows up both the pathetic inadequacy of Miss Maunciple's descents into unconsciousness and the absurdity of Joe Stoyte's timechase and of Jeremy Pordage's petty satisfactions of memory and anticipation. The greatest weakness of the book is that Mr. Propter, like Rampion, is a mere preacher.

This objection cannot be levelled at *Time Must Have a Stop*, where most of the doctrinal ideas appear in diary form and figure largely only toward the end of the novel. The timeless order here manifests itself dramatically, through the evocation of Uncle Eustace's post-mortem experiences. Here is the spurious endless duration of "horrible eternities" (175)—equivalent to purgatory or hell—as well as the "blue caressing silence, ubiquitously present," (231) which Uncle Eustace resists. Against these metaphysical realities are pitted the order of contemporary and future history and the drab recurrences of man's existential time. More sardonically than in any other of his works, Huxley here employs a transcendent point of view to expose the rags and tatters of memory which make up the structure of personality. The same orders are present in *Ape and Essence*, where Uncle Eustace's resistance to the light has become a positive diabolism, in accordance with Huxley's conviction that a contrally human position cannot be maintained without a transcendent *Point d'appui*. In *Ape and Essence*, history is transcended and explained by an eternal diabolic order; in the background, however, there is always the "silence and increasing light" (52) of eternity, which at the end of the book finds human embodiment in the love of Loola and Mr. Poole. The significant new element in *The Genius and the Goddess* is that the three orders of life and time come close to a reconciliation. (131) In terms of the book's characters and structure, these three orders positively interact as much as they conflict. Sexual love, for instance, is the source not only of disaster, but also of animal and human grace. Because of the positive valuation of love, this work presents probably the first character in Huxley's work—with the possible exception of Rachel Quarles in *Point Counter Point*—who is not either a sentimentalist or a depraved cynic. The mysticism is there, of course, but it affirms more than it denies. It is to be wished that Huxley would do a more ambitious work on the basis of the new-found unity.

The fictional time of most of Huxley's novels is relatively short; not being a psychological novelist, however, he does not educe the cosmic and existential orders of time directly from the characters in the course of the chronological span of the action. Nor

does he, like Virginia Woolf in *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*, use poetic prose to evoke the first of the two orders. To create a realm of timeless eternity, he will, as in *Point Counter Point*, use musical-structural devices, amplified by descriptive passages ; to give a sense of cosmic time, he will use scientific theory in reverse, the theory of evolution, for instance, in *After many a Summer* and *Ape and Essence*, and an inverted, diabolized Christianity, as in *Antic Hay*. Existential time is usually not given as experienced ; it appears, in narrative or descriptive form, as an existing configuration or a pre-existing ideal. The only exception is *Eyeless in Gaza*, which is remarkable among Huxley's novels because of its reliance on the structure of memory for its basic design. Yet, this novel is quite different from the novels by Mrs. Woolf and Joyce which are based on the memory structure. The principal difference becomes evident from the fact that, although *Eyeless in Gaza* covers thirty-two years in a fictional time proper of only about one and a half years, the past does not, in the actual composition, exfoliate from the present. Rather, its various stages are juxtaposed with the series of scenes constituting the extent of fictional time. Actually, then, in the composition of the work, no distinction obtains between fictional time and the time of the past and pre-past. This is, as already noted, the standard situation in books where the time-shift is consistently used, as, for instance, in Conrad's works. Such works, however, do not usually, as *Eyeless in Gaza* does, distinguish either thematically or structurally between the order of memory implicit *in toto* in a few moments of exsistential time and the span of chronological time which the memories cover. Huxley's peculiar structural scheme indicates that he was faced with an individual dilemma. On the one hand, the novel had to be a kind of spiritual autobiography and as such its entire action, mental, would spring from the affective memory. Huxley actually does allow his book to rise from the depths of the past, but only initially. Since the memories compose no meaningful unity by themselves, they have to be further disintegrated in order either to be purged or recomposed under the aegis of a new ethical and religious purpose. This is the underlying reason for Huxley's apparently mechanical use of the time-shift. The perspective of eternity both exposes the chaos of Anthony Beavis' existential time in all its horror and reveals a latent teleological pattern. Given the difficulty of the task, Huxley has acquitted himself creditably. The initial structural function of the affective memory, though manifest in the actual composition as the lunatic order of a series of apparently meaningless snapshots, sufficiently indicates the pattern of Anthony Beavis' existential time, while the perspective of eternity is stringently ubiquitous. Furthermore, the human variety of cosmic time, animal eternity, is equally pervasive. The simultaneity of these orders which Huxley achieves marks *Eyeless in Gaza* as a major novel.

References

- 1) For an indication that Conrad was concerned with the simultaneity, ironical or otherwise, of different orders of reality, see HD, 157
- 2) M. Bonnot, following Joseph Frank, has pointed out the unifying function of the clock in *Mrs. Dalloway*. The abstract time of Big Ben is the same for everybody ; consequently it creates a temporal and spatial universe around the characters (Op. cit., 462)

- 2) M. Bonnot has confused two orders of time when he applies the term collective durée not only to the chronological-social time common to the characters of the novel, but also to the internal temporal continuum in which they participate.
- 3) Op. cit., 85